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Top Marine Cracking Down

Tougher Screening, Joint Probe of Embassies Sought

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✓ By Molly Moore and Bill McAllister
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The commandant of the Marine Corps, acknowledging that "something went wrong with the system in Moscow," said yesterday he has ordered tougher screening and psychological tests for Marines assigned to sensitive posts.

Gen. P.X. Kelley also said he has recommended that a national-security task force staffed by the Defense and Justice departments be created to assist in the worldwide investigation of security breaches at U.S. diplomatic compounds. Kelley said he thinks that the Naval Investigative Service has been stretched to its limits.

Kelley, a four-star general who will retire this summer, said that he recommended Justice Department involvement in the cases on April 10, noting, "We had some lawyers who were frustrated that they did not feel that the bureaucracy was moving fast enough."

An internal Marine Corps memorandum obtained by the MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour said one reason for requesting the joint commission was a need for the influence of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the attorney general in dealing with the State Department, Central Intelligence Agency and National Security Agency, "which to this point have been less than totally cooperative with our investigative and prosecutorial efforts."

Kelley told reporters at a Pentagon briefing yesterday, "We now have the full cooperation of everybody in town."

The memorandum also said Justice Department assistance is needed because "we must expect that civilian embassy officers/employees will be implicated as the investigation continues."

Kelley said he has proposed assigning special Marine officers to temporary duty at key diplomatic posts around the world to scrutinize security unit operations and recommend improvements.

Kelley spent much of the 30-minute news conference defending the Marines' reputation, charging that the "Russians are trying to do do everything in their power to degrade and humiliate the United States Marine Corps."

Izvestia, the Soviet government's newspaper, detailed in an April 11 article a series of incidents allegedly involving the Marine security unit in Moscow. It mentioned many of the detachment's 28 guards by name and described fights, drunken brawls and a party at a country house operated by the U.S. embassy. Marine officials previously announced that several servicemen were disciplined as a result of that party.

Defense Department officials yesterday declined comment on the article.

Three Marine security guards have been charged with espionage for allegedly allowing Soviet agents to enter the embassy in Moscow and consulate in Leningrad, and a fourth has been accused of failing to report contacts with Soviet women. At least four other guards have been recalled from the embassy in Vienna on suspicion of having sexual relations with Soviet women.